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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 20 MAY 2025 | TUESDAY | BENGALURU | 21 DHU'L-QI'DAH, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 136 | Pages: 8

UCO Bank's ex-CMD held for laundering of over Rs 6.2K cr

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday said it has arrested former UCO Bank CMD Subodh Kumar Goel on money laundering charges in an alleged bank loan fraud case of more than Rs 6,200 crore linked to a Kolkata-based company. Goel was arrested from his residence in the national capital on 16 May in the case being probed against Concast Steel and Power Ltd (CSPL) and others. He was produced before the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Kolkata on 17 May, which sent him to ED custody till 21 May, the federal probe agency said in a statement. *—PTI*

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Ola techie's body found in HSR lake; suicide suspected

BENGALURU 19 MAY

The body of a 25-year-old techie was recovered from Agara Lake in HSR Layout police station limits earlier this month. The matter came to light on 8 May when a few locals found the body floating in the lake and alerted the jurisdictional police. Nikhil Somwanshi, was a Machine Learning Engineer working for Ola's artificial intelligence (AI) unit, Krutrim in Koramangala. Nearly two weeks after his death, the matter gained public attention following a series of social media posts by Nikhil's colleagues. These posts alleged that he had faced workplace harassment and claimed that "the authorities are trying their best to shut down the matter." *—Salar News*

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Biden diagnosed with aggressive prostate cancer

WASHINGTON, 19 MAY

Former US president Joe Biden was diagnosed with prostate cancer, his office said Sunday. The finding came after the 82-year-old reported urinary symptoms, which led doctors to discover a nodule on his prostate. He was diagnosed with prostate cancer on Friday, with the cancer cells having spread to the bone. In a post on X on Monday morning, Biden posted a photo of himself and his wife, Jill Biden, and wrote: "Cancer touches us all. Like so many of you, Jill and I have learned that we are strongest in the broken places. Thank you for lifting us up with love and support." Prostate cancers are graded for aggressiveness using what's known as a Gleason score. The scores range from 6 to 10, with 8, 9 and 10 prostate cancers behaving more aggressively. Biden's office said his score was 9, suggesting his cancer is the most aggressive. *—PTI*

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105MM RAIN TURNS BENGALURU ROADS TO RIVERS

Flooding brings tech parks to a standstill

Residents evacuated by boats amid waterlogging in City's Sai Layout on Monday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

BENGALURU, 19 MAY

Unusually heavy overnight rains pounding the City brought the country's IT capital to its knees on Monday, with the scenes of inundation, people wading through water and evacuation by inflatables.

With an average rainfall of 10.5 cm last night, City found itself deploying dinghies with essential supplies to sending tractor trailers to the rescue of those stranded in knee-deep water. Hobby weather watcher put the total at 15 to 20cm over the last few days.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) data, the City received 105.5mm of rainfall during the 24-hour period ending 8.30am on 19 May. The last time it rained this heavy here during this month was on 18 May, 2022. Incidentally, the all-time record for May stands at 153.9 mm, which was set on 6 May, 1909.

Sri Sai Layout, infamous for flooding the moment it rains, once again went underwater. The low-lying area again flooded up to chest level, forcing people, including senior citizens, to wade through it, before the tractor trolleys came to their rescue. According to officials, about 150 people were evacuated from the 300 homes in Sai Layout. The SDRF even faced a shortage of boats.

Silk Board Junction, a traffic headache for City even on good days, turned into a lucid nightmare when knee-deep water stagnation forced vehicles to be pulled over, slowing the traffic to almost a standstill. The traffic jam at Silk Board reportedly stretched for nearly 10km.

Uprooted trees served as yet another challenge to BBMP, especially in the Cubbon Park area where several fallen trees had to be towed away from roads with the help of JCBs. Trees fell and damaged vehicles in Jayanagar, too.

Manyata Tech Park, which is home to many multinational companies, resembled a lake. With over two feet of water blocking the entrances, commuting to offices became an adventure for many.

The yellow alert issued on 18 May to some regions in State, including City, remains valid for Tuesday, said IMD's Bengaluru Centre Director N Puviarasu. The affected districts include Bengaluru Urban, Bengaluru Rural, Kolar, Chikkaballapura, Tumakuru, Mandya, Mysuru, Hassan, Kodagu, Belagavi, Bidar, Raichur, Yadgir, Davanagere, and Chitradurga. *—PTI*

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Woman killed in wall collapse; 2 electrocuted in City

A 35-year-old woman, Shashikala, died on Monday when a rain-soaked wall of an IT firm collapsed on her, marking the season's first rain-related death. Later, Manmohan Kamath, 63, and Dinesh, 12, were electrocuted while clearing water at an apartment, raising toll to three. *—PTI*

CM blames 'unexpected rains' for people's woes

BENGALURU, 19 MAY

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday blamed the flooding in Bengaluru on unexpected heavy rainfall, amid criticism from the opposition over poor infrastructure and civic mismanagement.

Siddaramaiah said he had directed officials to undertake remodelling and de-silting of stormwater drains (SWDs) to address the issue. "Bengaluru has 859.90 km of SWDs. Retaining walls have been built for 491 km, 195 km are under construction, and work is underway to remodel 173 km with World Bank support," he said.

He postponed his planned visit to rain-affected areas to Wednesday, citing traffic concerns and poor visibility after sunset. "Once the remodelling is complete, flooding can be prevented," he assured.

He added that 210 low-lying areas had been identified as sensitive or hyper-sensitive. Work in 166 locations is done, while efforts are ongoing in 44, including 24 where work is in active progress. "Social media is totally biased," he said in response to online criticism. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said police had flagged 132 traffic-sensitive zones, of which 81 have been addressed, with work continuing in 41 remaining spots. *—PTI*

'ENTIRE NATION ASHAMED'

SC orders SIT probe against MP Minister over remarks on Col

MP Minister Vijay Shah and Col Sofiya Qureshi *PHOTOS: PTI, X/@KRVIJAYSHAH*

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

The Supreme Court on Monday came down heavily on Madhya Pradesh minister Vijay Shah for his derogatory remarks against Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, directing the formation of a special investigation team (SIT) to probe the FIR lodged against him.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh, referring to video evidence of Shah's comments, questioned the sincerity of his apology, calling it vague and conditional. "The entire nation was ashamed. You were on the verge of using filthy language. You should be ashamed," Justice Kant told Shah, adding that a public representative should lead by example and speak with responsibility.

The court criticised Shah's apology as insincere, noting he had said, "if I have said this or that...", rather than clearly admitting his mistake.

In compliance with the Madhya Pradesh High Court's order, the apex court directed the state's Director General of Police to set up a three-member SIT, headed by an officer of Inspector General rank and including a woman officer, by Tuesday 10 a.m. The first SIT report must be submitted to the court by 28 May.

Senior advocates Maninder Singh and Vibha Dutt Makhija appeared for Shah, who had earlier said he was willing to apologise "10 times" if anyone was hurt by his remarks and that he respected Col Qureshi "more than his sister." An FIR was registered against him in Indore on 14 May. *—PTI*

Suspected ISI agent arrested in UP's Rampur

Lucknow/Rampur, 19 May

The Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force (STF) on Sunday arrested a suspected agent of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Rampur. Identified as Shahzad, a resident of Tanda, he was allegedly involved in cross-border smuggling and espionage, passing sensitive national security information to Pakistani handlers. The STF's Moradabad unit apprehended him following intelligence inputs. Shahzad had travelled to Pakistan multiple times and reportedly smuggled goods like cosmetics, spices, and clothes. In a related case, Haryana Police recently arrested Nauman Ilahi (24), a native of Kairana, Uttar Pradesh, for allegedly supplying sensitive information to Pakistan-based contacts. He was working as a factory security guard in Panipat and was said to be in contact with an ISI handler. —PTI

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Army foiled Pakistan's drone attack on Golden Temple

AMRITSAR, 19 MAY

The Indian Army thwarted a Pakistan-backed drone attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar, as part of a broader military response under Operation Sindoor, launched after the Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 people.

According to ANI, Indian soldiers deployed along the international border revealed that between 8–9 May, Pakistani forces attempted infiltration and opened fire. "We fired accurately and forced them to retreat. By morning, they hoisted a white flag," a soldier said.

Operation Sindoor, initiated on 7 May, targeted terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK). Precision airstrikes destroyed key bases of Lashkar-e-Taiba in Muridke and Jaish-e-Mohammed in Bahawalpur, reportedly eliminating around 100 militants.

In retaliation, Pakistan launched Kamikaze drones, missiles, and micro-drones—allegedly of Turkish origin like the YIHA-III and Songar—towards Indian military installations and civilian areas, including the Golden Temple. However, all incoming threats were intercepted by India's ground-based air defence systems, with only 10 per cent of total ammunition used. *—PTI*

Army personnel display parts of a PL-15 air-to-air missile used by Pakistan to attack India *PHOTO: PTI*

SC relief to Ravi over remarks against Hebbalkar

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

The Supreme Court on Monday stayed the criminal proceedings against Karnataka BJP MLC C T Ravi for his alleged derogatory remarks against minister Laxmi Hebbalkar inside the Belagavi legislative council last year.

An FIR was lodged against Ravi under BNS Sections 75 (sexual harassment) and 79 (outraging the modesty of a woman) in December 2024.

A bench of Justices MM Sundresh and Rajesh Bindal stayed the proceedings after hearing submissions on the lawyer representing Ravi.

The BJP leader has challenged an order of the Karnataka High Court rejecting his petition seeking to quash the criminal proceedings initiated against him.

Earlier this month, the High Court observed that if the alleged remark or gesture was indeed directed at the complainant woman, it could be construed as outraging her modesty.

The top court in an interim order stayed the proceedings against Ravi and also sought a reply from the State government on his plea. *—PTI*

India not dharamshala: SC tells Lankan refugee

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

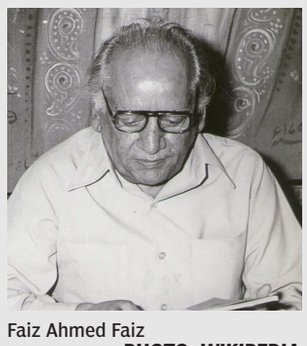
The Supreme Court on Monday stated that India is not a "dharamshala" (public shelter) for foreign nationals, while hearing a plea filed by a Sri Lankan citizen and former LTTE member challenging his deportation after completing a prison sentence under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and K Vinod Chandran dismissed the plea against a Madras High Court order which reduced the petitioner's sentence from 10 to seven years and directed his immediate deportation. The bench questioned the right of foreign nationals to seek settlement in India. "Is India to host refugees from all over the world? We are struggling with 140 crore people. This is not a dharamshala," the court observed.

The petitioner's counsel argued that the man faced arrest and torture in Sri Lanka and that his wife and children had settled in India. However, the bench clarified that fundamental rights such as Article 21 (protection of life and liberty) apply primarily to Indian citizens. "Go to some other country," the court remarked. He was convicted under Section 10 of the UAPA for being a member of an unlawful association. *—PTI*

ORGANISERS BOOKED

Singing Faiz's 'Hum Dekhenge' is sedition: Nagpur cops



Faiz Ahmed Faiz *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

MUMBAI, 19 MAY

Singing revolutionary poetry is drawing sedition charges in India. In Nagpur, organisers and a speaker at a memorial event for actor-activist Vira Sathidar have been booked under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including Section 152 (sedition), Section 196 (promoting enmity), and Section 353 (public mischief).

The 13 May event at Vidarbha Sahitya Sangh featured Mumbai-based cultural group Samata Kala Manch performing Faiz Ahmed Faiz's iconic poem 'Hum Dekhenge'. A complaint by local resident Dattatray Shirke—based on a news report by ABP Majha—alleged the recital posed a threat to the government.

"At a time when the country valiantly fought Pakistani forces, the radical left in Nagpur were busy singing Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem," Shirke claimed, objecting to the line 'takht hilaane ki zaroorat hai'. However, the actual line in the poem is "sab takht giraye jayenge".

The event also featured social activist Uttam Jagirdar, who criticised the proposed Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2024. Activists warn the bill could legalise branding dissenters as "urban Naxals".

Despite a Supreme Court stay on sedition charges in 2022, Nagpur police invoked similar BNS provisions. Vira Sathidar, who passed away in 2021, had long been targeted for his activism, and critics say state harassment has continued posthumously.

This is Nagpur's second free speech-related case this month. Kerala journalist Rejaz M Sheeba Sydeek was arrested for a social media post opposing the Indian Army and is being investigated for alleged links to banned groups. *—Agencies*

The 105.5mm of rainfall during the 24-hour period ending 8.30am on Monday brought to the fore the state of the City's infrastructure. Poorly maintained stormwater drains, dug up roads and administrative neglect were visible everywhere. Top row; residents evacuated from Sai Layout. Bottom row; waterlogging at Silk Board, vehicles stuck at Sai Layout and people try to push a bus at Koramangala

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

RAIN POUNDS, CITY DROWNS

With India's Silicon Valley turning into a virtual island, peeved residents blame incomplete infrastructure

BENGALURU, 18 MAY

Even before the monsoon has officially arrived, City found itself underwater, thanks to the unpreparedness of the civic authorities.

With just a few hours of heavy rainfall, large swathes of City, particularly low-lying areas like Hebbal, KR Market, Shivajinagar, Govindaraj Nagar, and Nagawara, were reduced to islands amid a sea of administrative apathy and civic negligence.

Power outages gripped many parts of the City, with residents in Bengaluru North and East division reporting disruptions or no electricity for over 24 hours. BESCOM officials claimed workers are "working round the clock", but the reality is grim.

At KR Market, the streets resembled a lake by Monday morning. "There's half a foot of water on the road. I had to push my bike like a cart," said Javed Ahmed, an auto driver. "We are not angry at the rain. We are angry at the system."

Meanwhile, in Hebbal, a KSRTC bus narrowly avoided tragedy when a tree crashed onto it, thanks to the driver's alertness. "If I hadn't braked in time, it could have been a disaster," he told Salar News.

"No one from the BBMP or other agency shows up until some tragedy happens," said 55-year-old Zulekha Banu from Shivajinagar.

Why City floods: Dug-up roads, neglect and garbage

Clogged drains, poor desilting efforts, unscientific white-topping projects, and years of civic neglect, especially in slum and low-income areas are obvious causes of City's now-regular flood horror. Many drains in the City's older neighbourhoods haven't been cleaned for over a year, residents claim.

"There has been no real infrastructure work done in the last year," said Ravi M from Govindaraj Nagar. "All they've done is dig roads, then leave them in worse shape than before. Every corner has become a dump yard."

In East Bengaluru, areas like Banaswadi, HBR Layout and Kamraj Nagar witnessed reverse flow from stormwater drains, inundating homes and roads alike. Emergency teams were deployed with pumps and tractors to flush out water, but residents spent the night bailing water out with buckets.

In South Bengaluru's Madiwala, Koramangala and Ejipura, narrow culverts connecting K-100 and K-200 drains couldn't handle the volume, flooding homes and submerging parked vehicles. "Our bikes were floating like boats," said Devraj, a resident of Ejipura's Grape Garden.

The situation was no better in West and North Bengaluru. In Rajarajeshwari Nagar, five cattle died due to backflow in Vrishabhavathi Valley. Around 100 homes in Kote Layout, Kengeri, were inundated. *—Salar News*

As many drains in the City's older neighbourhoods haven't been cleaned for over a year, the rainwater simply had no where to go, on Monday

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Choking traffic and fallen trees

BENGALURU, 19 MAY

Citywide, 27 trees and 43 branches were brought down by the storm. Thirty BBMP teams were dispatched to clear debris. But the damage was done: long traffic snarls were reported on Silk Board Junction, Viveknagar Main Road, and Nayandahalli underpass, where a BMTC bus and two other vehicles broke down in standing water. The Bangalore Electricity Supply Company "Our bus was stuck at Shantinagar depot for six hours," said Manjunath, a BMTC staffer. "The depot itself was underwater." *—Salar News*

Aruna Lakshmi and Gali Janardhan Reddy ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Janardhan's wife may contest Gangavathi bypolls

BELAGAVI, 19 MAY

Gali Janardhan Reddy's wife, Aruna Lakshmi, is expected to contest as either an Independent or from BJP in the Gangavathi in Koppal district by-polls. Reddy was recently disqualified after being found guilty of illegal mining and sentenced to seven years of imprisonment.

Reddy floated his own political outfit KRPP after being denied a ticket by the BJP and won the election. However, his arrest mandated the bypolls.

Aruna contested from Ballari city assembly constituency from KRPP in 2023 but lost to Congress' Nara Bharat Reddy by huge margin of 80,744 to 46,171 votes.

Given the margin of defeat, the chances of her getting a BJP ticket are low, even though former BJP MPs Karadi Sanganna and Paranna Munavalli offered support. *—Salar News*

Belagavi cops lathicharge villagers

BELAGAVI, 19 MAY

The Belagavi police on Sunday night lathicharged people who asked for a government land to bury a slain soldier, in Bailhongal taluk of Belagavi.

Vishnu Karjol, 25, served in the Maratha Light Infantry Regiment Centre at Belagavi. He had suffered an injury while on the duty, three months ago. He died on Wednesday. Villagers asked the Bailhongal tahasildar to provide separate land to bury him but the requested was denied. People protested, to which the police lathicharged. *—Salar News*

Govt tries to swim as Oppn turns tide

BENGALURU, 19 MAY

The ruling Congress promised to work hard to fix the plethora of rain related issues in the City, but the Opposition used the moment to tear into the State government.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, also in charge of Bengaluru, said he was in touch with officials concerned and is "closely monitoring the situation".

"I've been in continuous touch with the concerned officers, and I'm closely monitoring the situation. I will be visiting the BBMP War Room and flood-affected areas personally," he wrote on X.

The Opposition BJP mounted an offensive, alleging the crores of rupees spent over the last two years on infrastructure have yielded no results.

State BJP General Secretary and MLA of Karkala, Sunil Kumar Karkala challenged the government on X to release a white paper on how much has actually been spent on City's infrastructure over the last two years.

"Visit Silk Board once — you'll see your real contribution," he said. *—PTI*

> **Last night's rains didn't expose Bengaluru's infrastructure — they exposed DK Shivakumar's track record of two years of doing nothing**
>
> -Ashwath Narayan, Malleshwaram MLA

> **The issues we face today are not new. They have been ignored for years, across governments and administrations. The only difference now is - we are working to solve them. Not with temporary fixes, but with long-term, sustainable solutions**
>
> -DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

Woman killed after falling under moving bus on Mysuru Road

BENGALURU, 19 MAY

A 58-year-old woman was tragically run over by a bus shortly after disembarking at the Satellite Bus Stand on Mysuru Road, on Monday.

The victim, Krishnaveni, was a resident of Hegganahalli, Peenya 2nd Stage, and had moved to the City from Tamil Nadu with her family two months ago. On the morning of the accident, she had returned to the City after attending a relative's funeral in her hometown.

Witnesses report that Krishnaveni arrived at the bus stand around 4.30am, amid rainy conditions. As she stepped off the private overnight bus, she was attempting to collect her belongings when the vehicle unexpectedly began to move. In the ensuing confusion and poor visibility, it is believed she lost her balance and fell beneath the bus. She was pronounced dead at the scene.

The circumstances of her death came to light half an hour later when Krishnaveni's mobile phone began ringing. Concerned family members, unable to reach her, received shocking news from a passerby who discovered her phone lying on the road.

Police are actively searching for the bus and its driver, who reportedly fled the scene after the incident. *—Salar News*

'BULLIED' AT WORK

Ola techie's body found in HSR lake; suicide suspected

BENGALURU 19 MAY

The body of a 25-year-old techie was recovered from Agara Lake in HSR Layout police station limits earlier this month. The matter came to light on 8 May when a few locals found the body floating in the lake and alerted the jurisdictional police.

The deceased, Nikhil Somwanshi, was a Machine Learning Engineer working for Ola's artificial intelligence (AI) unit, Krutrim in Koramangala. He was a graduate from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), and as per his LinkedIn profile, had joined Krutrim in August 2024, as his first job.

The HSR Layout Police initially registered a case of unnatural death (UDR) and launched an investigation to ascertain the cause of death.

Nearly two weeks after his death, the matter gained public attention following a series of social media posts by Nikhil's colleagues. These posts alleged that he had faced workplace harassment and claimed that "the authorities are trying their best to shut down the matter."

Nikhil Somwanshi ***PHOTO: SALAR***

In a statement to the police, Nikhil's family and friends also alleged that he had been subjected to mental harassment by his manager, reportedly a US national. They claimed that the manager intimidated new employees and imposed unrealistic workloads, which allegedly contributed to Nikhil's deteriorating mental health.

Krutrim in response said Nikhil was on personal leave at the time of the incident. "Nikhil was on personal leave at the time of the incident. He had reached out to his manager on the 8th of April, expressing that he needed rest, and was promptly granted personal time off. Later, on the 17th of April, he shared that he was feeling better but would benefit from additional rest, and his leave was extended accordingly," the company clarified.

Police have not confirmed the harassment allegations but are expected to summon company representatives and colleagues. *—Salar News*

(Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.)

Centre opposes in Delhi HC's plea of Celebi Pvt Ltd

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

Centre on Monday opposed in Delhi High Court pleas of Turkish company Celebi Airport Services India Pvt Ltd and another firm against decision of aviation watchdog BCAS revoking its security clearance. Appearing before Justice Sachin Datta, Centre's Solicitor General Tushar Mehta argued decision was taken in interest of national security in light of certain inputs that continuing services of the petitioner companies would be hazardous in the current scenario. The security clearance of the firms was revoked by Bureau of Civil Aviation Safety on 15 May, days after Turkey-backed Pakistan and condemned India's strikes on Pak's terror camps. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Visa curb on Indian illegal immigration agencies: US

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, 19 MAY

US on Monday said that it is imposing visa restrictions on owners, executives, and senior officials of travel agencies in India for knowingly facilitating "illegal immigration" to US. "Mission India's Consular Affairs and Diplomatic Security Service work every day across our Embassy and Consulates to actively identify and target those engaged in facilitating illegal immigration and human smuggling and trafficking operations," State Department said. It added that US will "continue to take steps to impose visa restrictions against owners, executives, and senior officials of travel agencies to cut off alien smuggling networks". It said, visa restriction policy is global and applies to individuals who otherwise qualify for Visa Waiver Programme.—*PTI*

Kerala moves SC, to intervene in Waqf case

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

Kerala government has moved the Supreme Court to intervene in the batch of pleas against the constitutional validity of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025. The state government submitted the 2025 amendment deviated from the scope of the parent Waqf Act, 1995 and its Muslim population, having waqf properties, has a "genuine apprehension" that the amendment would affect their fundamental rights under the Constitution and alter the nature of their waqf properties. A bench comprising Chief Justice B R Gavai and Justice Augustine George Masih is scheduled to hear the pleas challenging the constitutional validity of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 on Tuesday. The Centre notified the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 after it got President Droupadi Murmu's assent on 5 April. —*PTI*

12 alleged spies held in 3 states so far

Assam's police have arrested 71 individuals for alleged anti-national activities

AGRA, 19 MAY

At least 12 people, including a YouTuber, have been nabbed on the charges of spying for Pakistan in the past two weeks from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh with investigations pointing out that they were allegedly part of a Pakistan-linked espionage network operating in north India, police said.

On 4 May, Punjab Police arrested Falaksher Masih and Suraj Masih -- both residents of Ajnala in Amritsar -- for their alleged role in leaking sensitive information and photographs of Army cantonment areas and air bases in the border district to ISI.

In a troubling escalation of security concerns, two individuals have been arrested in connection with raising pro-Pakistan slogans during a "Tiranga Yatra" in the Shahganj area of Agra. The

Shehzad, Jyoti Malhotra and Devinder Singh Dhillon *PHOTO:X*

suspects, Gopal Chahar and Arjun Girj, face charges under Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita for endangering India's integrity. The arrests came after a video of the incident went viral, prompting local Congress leader Apoorv Sharma to file a complaint.

In Punjab's Gurdaspur, two men were apprehended for leaking sensitive military details related to "Operation Sindoor," including troop movements in strategic regions. Police recovered three mobile phones and live ammunition from them, confirming their connections to handlers in Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Additionally, Assam's police report that 71 individuals have been arrested for alleged anti-national activities following a recent terror attack in Pahalgam. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma stated that the police are closely monitoring digital spaces for any further threats.

The multiple arrests highlight ongoing concerns about national security and the potential for espionage and sedition within India.

Nuh Police, in a joint operation with a central agency, arrested a local quack for allegedly spying for Pakistan. This comes after the arrest of Arman from the Rajaka village two days ago on same charges, police said on Monday. The police identified the arrested accused as Mohammad Tarif, a resident of the Kangarka village in the Nuh district. He is accused of leaking intelligence information of military activities to Pakistan. The accused has allegedly confessed to giving a SIM card to an employee at the Pakistan High Commission and going to Pakistan, they added. —*PTI*

'We must catch all other agents'

PUNE, 19 MAY

Hemant Mahajan *PHOTO:ANI*

Following the arrest of YouTuber Jyoti Malhotra for allegedly sharing sensitive information and being in continuous contact with a Pakistani citizen, Defence Expert Hemant Mahajan on Monday said that they must must catch all other agents that are operating for Pakistan and China in India. "It is very good news... Pakistan needs agents to retrieve information about various internal matters, including our military leaders and our morale... The battle between agents and us will continue, and we have to ensure that all suspected people are under surveillance and their mobile/communication devices are spied upon" Mahajantold ANI. Jyoti Malhotra, a resident of Hisar, Haryana, was arrested for allegedly sharing sensitive information and being in continuous contact with a Pakistani citizen. —*ANI*

TMC, BJP spar as Pathan opts out of all-party delegation

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

The BJP on Monday accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of forcing TMC MP Yusuf Pathan to opt out from the multi-party diplomatic delegation, terming it "unfortunate".

TMC sources said Pathan, named by the Centre in one of the delegations, has opted out of the tour, even as the party insisted it is not boycotting the diplomatic effort and only wants that it should be allowed to pick its representative.

Pathan's name was announced as part of a delegation led by Janata Dal (United) MP Sanjay Jha that is set to go to Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan and Singapore to convey India's message on Operation Sindoor.

Earlier, TMC Lok Sabha parliamentary party leader Sudip Bandyopadhyay was approached by the government to join the delegation. He had, however, turned down the offer citing health reasons.

Yusuf Pathan *PHOTO:PTI*

While the sources did not specify the reason for Pathan's decision, both West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and TMC national General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Monday said that the Centre should not decide the party's nominee to the delegations.

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Monday declined to join issue with some opposition parties, including his own, over the government's choice of MPs from their ranks for all-party delegations to foreign capitals following Operation Sindoor.

"I am absolutely not getting into that subject," he told reporters as the Chairman of Parliament's Standing Committee on External Affairs arrived for its meeting, which is being briefed by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on the India-Pakistan military conflict after the 22 April Pahalgam terror attack.

Asked about Parliamentary Affairs Minister Rijiju's reported remarks that the government never asked the Congress to give names, Ramesh said, "That is a lie -- LIE -- absolute lie. He had a conversation in the morning of 16 May with the Congress president and Mr Rahul Gandhi and in pursuance of that conversation the latter wrote to Mr Rijiju suggesting four names."

Ramesh accused the BJP and the prime minister of having played "cheap politics" on the issue. – *PTI*

China offers support for India-Pakistan ceasefire

BEIJING, 19 MAY

China has expressed its intention to play a constructive role in achieving a "lasting ceasefire" between India and Pakistan during a visit from Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar. Dar has arrived for a three-day visit—the first by a senior Pakistani official since India's recent military action in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on 7 May.

Dar's discussions with Chinese diplomat Wang Yi are expected to cover various topics, including the Indus Water Treaty, which India recently put on hold. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning underscored significance of Dar's visit, calling China and Pakistan "all-weather strategic cooperative partners."

The meeting comes after India and Pakistan reached an understanding on 10 May to de-escalate conflict following intense military exchanges. Mao, however, deflected inquiries regarding China's military assistance to Pakistan during the recent hostilities, directing such questions to "competent authorities" in China.

Ishaq Dar, who landed in Beijing on Monday for a three-day visit, is the first high-level Pakistani official to visit China after India's 'Operation Sindoor *PHOTO:X/ Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

China's media have shown significant interest in the India-Pakistan confrontations, with reports primarily reflecting Pakistan's narrative. Meanwhile, reports suggest growing concerns in Beijing about Pakistan's overtures to US officials. – *PTI*

Manipur violence: Militant arrested from Kerala

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

- Rajkumar Maipaksana was arrested from Kannur district of Kerala and has been sent in transit remand by the NIA special court, Kochi, for production before the Imphal NIA court, they said.

National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested from Kerala a militant of a banned insurgent group involved in the brutal killing of a woman and looting of houses in a village in Manipur's Jiribam district last year, officials said on Monday.

Rajkumar Maipaksana was arrested from Kannur district of Kerala and has been sent in transit remand by the NIA special court, Kochi, for production before the Imphal NIA court, they said. Hailing from Jiribam district, Rajkumar is associated with the proscribed insurgent group People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak, a statement said.

He was among the key perpetrators of the crime, in which a woman, Zosangkim, was killed and several houses were set afire and looted in Zairawn village in November 2024, it said. The 31-year-old tribal woman, killed on 7 November, was subjected to third-degree torture and suffered 99 per cent burns, according to her autopsy report.

The violence started after a "Tribal Solidarity March" was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status. – *PTI*

EXEMPLARY PERFORMANCE

Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi visits Laungewala in the forward areas of the Konark Corps in the desert sector to congratulate the troops for their exemplary role during Operation Sindoor and to review the joint actions undertaken in coordination with the Indian Air Force and the Border Security Force *PHOTO:PTI*

Ajit Doval talks regional issues with Iranian NSA

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

National Security Advisor Ajit Doval engaged in a phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart, Ali Akbar Ahmadian, on Sunday, focusing on regional security issues and the development of the Chabahar port project.

According to an Iranian readout, Doval praised Iran's "constructive role" in regional affairs and expressed India's commitment to further enhancing cooperation, particularly in relation to the Chabahar port and the International North-South Transport Corridor. This conversation comes in the wake of recent military tensions between India-Pak. – *PTI*

LIMIT LIABILITY ON SUPPLIERS

Govt considering amendments to nuclear power domain laws

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

Government is considering amendments to the laws governing the nuclear power domain, including the sectoral regulator, to allow participation of private sector as India eyes to produce 100 GW atomic energy by 2047.

Government sources said amendments were being considered to the Atomic Energy Act to allow private sector participation and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act to limit the liability on suppliers of equipment to build atomic energy plants.

The government is also considering regulatory reforms and is evaluating the model of Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (INSPACe) which acts as the promoter and regulator for the space sector that was opened up for private participation in 2020.

The government is also considering regulatory reforms and is evaluating the model of Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center *PHOTO: ANI*

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced opening up of the nuclear power sector which has been restricted to public sector companies.

The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited operates atomic power plants across the country that contribute 8.7 GWe to the country's energy mix.

Sitharaman also announced the Nuclear Energy Mission for research and development of Small Modular Reactors (SMR) with an outlay of Rs 20,000 crore and to operationalise five indigenously developed SMRs by 2033. —*ANI*

Gujarat Min's son held in Rs 71 cr MGNREGA scam

DAHOD, 17 MAY

Kiran Khabad, son of Gujarat Minister Bachubhai Khabad, has been arrested in connection with a massive Rs 71 crore scam involving the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). His arrest comes just two days after that of his elder brother, Balvant.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Jagdishsinh Bhandari confirmed that three others were also apprehended on Monday, bringing the total number of arrests in the case to eleven.

The accused allegedly orchestrated a scheme that saw multiple contracted agencies obtain payments from the government without fulfilling project requirements.

It is claimed that from 2021 to 2024, 35 agency owners colluded with government officials to misappropriate funds by submitting bogus work completion certificates and forged documentation. – *PTI*

Uday Singh named first national President of Jan Suraaj party

PATNA, 19 MAY

The Jan Suraaj Party, founded by Prashant Kishor, has announced the unanimous election of former BJP MP Uday Singh as its first national president.

At a press conference held in Patna, Kishor revealed that this decision was made by a dedicated committee, emphasising that Singh was selected "not by a mere majority, but unanimously."

Kishor expressed his intention to focus on public outreach, stating that he would delegate the organisational responsibilities to Singh and RCP Singh, who joined the party just days prior.

"I can now resume my 'padayatra' in Bihar from tomorrow," Kishor added.

Since its inception on 2 October last year, the Jan Suraaj Party had been operating without a full-time President.

Although Kishor has made it clear that he will not hold an official post within the party,

Jan Suraaj party founder Prashant Kishor with Uday Singh *PHOTO:ANI*

former IPS officer Manoj Bharti was appointed as the "working president" shortly after the party's establishment.

The appointment of Uday Singh marks a significant step for the party as it aims to expand its influence and strengthen its organisational framework ahead of upcoming political challenges. – *PTI*

Google helps trace mentally-ill woman's family

PALGHAR, 19 MAY

A 50-year-old mentally-ill woman, who had been missing from Maharashtra's Thane district since December 2023, has been reunited with her family. Fuldevi Sant Lal, originally from Uttar Pradesh, was found in a destitute state by the police in Nallasopara, Palghar district. She was taken to Samarth Ashram, managed by the NGO Jeevan Anand Sanstha, which focuses on rehabilitating underprivileged individuals. Staff and volunteers at the ashram used Google search to trace her home village and contact her relatives. Despite being in touch with her family, they were initially unable to collect her. However, after five months, her relatives finally arrived on Sunday to take her home. *—PTI*

FIR against 100 for unauthorised protests in Thane

THANE, 19 MAY

Authorities have lodged a case against over 100 individuals who participated in unauthorised human chain protests in Thane district, Maharashtra, on 16 May. The protests occurred at six locations within the Mumbra area, despite existing prohibitory orders under the Maharashtra Police Act. Police reported that participants disrupted traffic and defied lawful restrictions. A police official noted that no permission was granted for the demonstration, raising concerns about potential disturbances to communal harmony and public order. The FIR cites violations of relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Maharashtra Police Act, with three individuals already identified as key organisers. The protests were reportedly held to contest an externment order against a local journalist. *—PTI*

5 killed as car falls onto dry riverbed in Ratnagiri

MUMBAI, 19 MAY

A car accident in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra early this morning killed five individuals and left two injured. The incident occurred near Khed at approximately 5.45am when a speeding vehicle struck a divider before plunging into the dry riverbed of the Jagbudi River. The car was en route from Nallasopara in Palghar district to Devrukh town when the accident took place. The deceased have been identified as Mitali Vivek More, 43, Megha Paradkar, 22, Saurabh Paradkar, 22, Nihar Mor, 19, and Shreyas Sawant, 23. Rescue teams from Khed police station promptly arrived at the scene, where the vehicle had crashed into boulders due to the riverbed being dry. *—PTI*

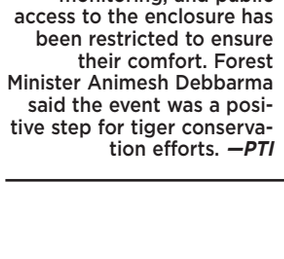


PHOTO: PIXABAYW

In a first, Tripura zoo welcomes three tiger cubs

AGARTALA, 19 MAY

Sepahijala Zoo in Tripura welcomed its first-ever tiger cubs, with three healthy additions born to a tigress on 11 May. This marks a joyous moment and significant milestone for the state's only zoo, established in 1972, and increases the population of big cats there to five. The pair of tigers, brought from West Bengal as part of an animal exchange programme, has been successfully bred. While the mother and her cubs are thriving in their enclosure, the male tiger has been temporarily relocated as a precaution. Eleven CCTV cameras have been installed for 24-hour monitoring, and public access to the enclosure has been restricted to ensure their comfort. Forest Minister Animesh Debbarma said the event was a positive step for tiger conservation efforts. *—PTI*

Allahabad HC upholds Sambhal mosque survey

Judge says Sambhal court order is maintainable under law

PRAYAGRAJ/SAMBHAL, 19 MAY

The Allahabad High Court on Monday dismissed a petition filed by the Shahi Jama Masjid Committee challenging a district court's order for a survey of the disputed Shahi Jama Masjid and Harihar Temple site in Sambhal.

Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal ruled that the civil suit filed in the Sambhal court and the appointment of an advocate commissioner to conduct the survey were maintainable under the law.

The Masjid Committee had moved the High Court contesting the validity of the suit and the survey order passed by the Civil Judge (Senior Division), Sambhal. The suit was filed by Hari Shanker Jain and seven others, who claimed the mosque was constructed in 1526 by Mughal emperor Babur after demolishing the Harihar Mandir at Mohalla Kot Purvi in Sambhal district.

The Masjid Committee had moved the High Court contesting the validity of the suit and the survey order passed by civil judge, Sambhal **PHOTO: PTI**

While the High Court had earlier stayed proceedings in the trial court, it has now cleared the way for the survey to proceed. Advocate Shri Gopal Sharma, representing the Hindu side, welcomed the decision, stating that the survey ordered was legal and appropriate. Shakeel Ahmed Warsi, counsel for the Masjid Committee, said the High Court's decision followed proper judicial procedure.

According to the Masjid Committee, the suit was filed on 19 November 2024, and within hours, a survey was ordered and conducted the same day. A follow-up survey took place on 24 November, and a report was due before the court by 29 November.

The dispute has led to tensions in the area. On 24 November 2024, violence erupted near the mosque during protests, resulting in four deaths and multiple injuries due to stone-pelting and arson.

The Supreme Court, hearing a related plea, had on 10 January ordered status quo regarding a "private" well near the mosque's entrance. Notices were issued to the Centre, ASI, Sambhal DM, and Hindu litigants. On 29 November last year, the top court directed the Sambhal court to halt proceedings and asked the UP government to ensure peace in the region.

The Masjid Committee had approached the Supreme Court on 28 November 2024 seeking an ex-parte stay on the original district court order. *—PTI*

All HC judges entitled to full pension: SC

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

In a significant verdict, the Supreme Court on Monday held that all high court judges, including additional judges, will be entitled to full pension and retirement benefits.

The top court said the former chief justices of the high court will get Rs 15 lakh per annum as pension.

Observing that denial would amount to violation of right to equality under Article 14 of the Constitution, a bench comprising Chief Justice BR Gavai and Justice Augustine George Masih said full pension will be paid to all, irrespective of when they were appointed and whether they retired as additional judges or were later made permanent.

The bench said discriminating among judges based on the timing of their appointment or their designation violates this fundamental right. The CJI, pronouncing the verdict, said families of deceased additional HC judges are also entitled to the same pension and retirement benefits as families of permanent judges.

"We hold any discrimination as violative of Article 14," it said. *—PTI*

SC extends Katara murder convict's bail

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

The Supreme Court on Monday extended by four weeks the interim bail of 2002 Nitish Katara murder case convict Vikas Yadav to attend to his ailing mother. The bench also directed him to show by 27 May proof that his mother has undergone surgery. Imposing conditions, the top court on 24 April directed the convict to remain confined to his house. *—PTI*

Judge in cash row: SC to hear plea

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

The Supreme Court on Monday agreed to list for urgent hearing a plea seeking an FIR against former Allahabad High Court Justice Yashwant Varma in connection with the cash discovery row. A bench comprising Chief Justice BR Gavai and Justice Augustine George Masih took note of the submission and said, "It can be listed tomorrow if defects are cured." *—PTI*

FSL TEAM INSPECTS

Multi-disciplinary team to probe Hyd fire that killed 17

HYDERABAD, 19 MAY

The Telangana government has asked five departments, including fire and police, to go into the devastating fire in a building that left 17 people dead and submit a report, state Transport Minister Ponnam Prabhakar said on Monday.

The officials of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), fire, police, revenue department and the Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency (HYDRAA) would jointly probe the tragedy and submit a report to the government, said Prabhakar, the in-charge minister for Hyderabad.

The officials are expected to visit the building near the Charminar on Monday and have already submitted a preliminary report on the incident.

As part of measures to prevent such fire mishaps in future, the government would involve local public representatives to impress upon residents of old buildings to install fire safety measures in the interest of their safety, Prabhakar added.

There are many century-old buildings, including the one that caught fire, at Gulzar Houz and the surrounding areas.

Meanwhile, a team from the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) is scheduled to visit the scene for investigation, said a senior police official.

Telangana minister Ponnam Prabhakar inspects the site on Monday, a day after the building near Charminar in Hyderabad caught fire **PHOTO: PTI**

Further investigation would proceed as per its findings, he added.

A blaze triggered by a suspected short circuit in a building near the iconic Charminar here on Sunday killed 17 people, including eight children, belonging to an extended family of a jeweller. The fire broke out at a building in Gulzar Houz here, police said. *—PTI*

Trapped in car, 4 children die of suffocation

DWARAKAPUDI, 19 MAY

Four children died of suffocation after being trapped inside a parked car in Vizianagaram district, police said on Monday.

The children, who were playing outside the house, entered the parked vehicle at around noon on Sunday. "They were unable to exit as the doors of the unlocked car automatically locked after entry," police added.

"We believe the car's autolock system engaged once the kids got in, trapping them," a police official told PTI, adding that the bodies were discovered six hours later, post-6pm on Sunday.

Of the four children, two were siblings, while the others belonged to separate families. *—PTI*

SC refuses to waive AGR dues of telecom firms

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed the pleas of telecom majors Vodafone, Airtel and Tata Teleservices seeking the waiver of adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues.

A bench comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan called the pleas "misconceived".

"We are really shocked by these petitions... It is not expected of a multinational company. We will dismiss it," the bench told Vodafone's lawyer Mukul Rohatgi.

The top court refused to come in the way of the government wanting to help the telecom companies.

Vodafone has sought a waiver of around Rs 30,000 crore towards interest, penalty and interest on penalty components of its AGR dues. *—PTI*

Constitution doesn't back forced conversion: HC

PRAYAGRAJ, 19 MAY

The Allahabad High Court has observed that though the Indian Constitution gives every citizen the right to freely follow and spread their religion, it does not support forced or fraudulent conversions.

Justice Vinod Diwaker made the observation while rejecting a plea to cancel an FIR against four accused under the UP Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Act, 2021. According to the complaint, the accused tried to convert people to Christianity by offering money and free medical care. The court refused to cancel the case, stating that the charges were serious and valid enough for police investigation.

The court observed, "India's constitutional framework guarantees the right to religious freedom under Article 25. This Article confers upon every person the fundamental right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality and health. The use of the word 'freely' in Article 25 underscores the voluntary nature of religious belief and expression... However, the Constitution does not endorse forced or fraudulent conversions, nor does it shield coercive or deceptive practices under the guise of religious propagation," it added. *—PTI*

Melting glaciers, rain wreak havoc in HP

SHIMLA, 19 MAY

Authorities at the Pandoh Dam in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh have cautioned the public and tourists against venturing near the banks of River Beas, warning that spill gates may be opened due to rising water levels caused by rain and melting glaciers.

Isolated weather events were reported across Himachal Pradesh on Monday. Thunderstorms in Sundernagar uprooted trees, disrupting travel for schoolchildren and office-goers. Dark clouds hovered over Mandi and Shimla, while thunderstorms also affected Kangra, Palampur, Jot, Bhuntar, Kalpa and Sundernagar.

Flash floods in the Udaipur sub-division of Lahaul and Spiti blocked the Sansari-Killar-Tindi-Thirot road **PHOTO: ANI**

- Isolated weather events were reported across Himachal Pradesh on Monday. Thunderstorms in Sunder-nagar uprooted trees, disrupting travel for schoolchildren and office-goers

Flash floods in the Udaipur sub-division of Lahaul and Spiti blocked the Sansari-Killar-Tindi-Thirot road. Police advised against travelling on the route, as rainfall hampered clearance operations.

Since Sunday evening, Mandi recorded 16.4 mm of rain, followed by Jot (15.8 mm), Kukumseri (13.2 mm), Kangra (12.4 mm), Bharmour (12 mm), and Pandoh (10 mm). Kangra and Jot experienced hailstorms. Gusty winds reaching 54 km/h swept through Reckong Peo, Hamirpur, Tabo, Bilaspur, Kufri, and Sundernagar. *—PTI*

VEHICLE MASSGRAVES

Public space precious, don't dump cars: HC

MUMBAI, 19 MAY

The Bombay High Court has ruled that Mumbai's scarce public spaces cannot be used as dumping grounds for abandoned or confiscated vehicles. In a firm directive, the court ordered all police stations in the city to strictly implement traffic police guidelines for the disposal of such vehicles.

A bench comprising Justices GS Kulkarni and Advait Sethna passed the order on 8 May while hearing a plea from Marathon Maxima Co-operative Housing Society. The society had raised objections over vehicles being dumped by a nearby police station outside its premises, obstructing access.

The bench noted that mere shifting of seized vehicles to dumping yards is insufficient and called for continuous efforts to dispose of them. "In a city like Mumbai, which faces an acute scarcity of space, public roads and footpaths cannot be encroached upon for storing such vehicles," the court observed.

The bench noted that mere shifting of seized vehicles to dumping yards is insufficient and called for continuous efforts to dispose of them **PHOTO: X**

The Additional Commissioner of Police (Traffic) stated in an affidavit that a communication had been issued to all city police stations last month, directing that all abandoned vehicles be moved to dumping yards.

- The ACP (Traffic) stated in an affidavit that all city police stations were directed last month to move all abandoned vehicles to dumping yards

The court urged the state government to identify appropriate dumping locations in each civic ward and stressed that disposal, not just relocation, is essential. It asked the traffic department to report proposed long-term solutions at the next hearing on 2 July.

The court warned that any breach of these directions would result in departmental action. The BMC has awarded a contract to a private firm for identifying and scrapping such vehicles. *—PTI*

Dalit woman alleges custodial harassment

T'PURAM, 19 MAY

A 39-year-old Dalit woman in Kerala has made grave allegations against local police and the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) following her wrongful arrest in a theft case that was later disproved. R Bindhu, who works as a domestic helper, claims she was subjected to severe mental torment during her detention at Peroorkada police station last month after the owner of her employer's home accused her of stealing a gold chain.

In a press conference, Bindhu recounted her distressing experience, revealing that despite submitting a complaint to the CMO's political secretary, P Sasi, with legal assistance, her grievances were dismissed without consideration. The former home minister and current Leader of Opposition, VD Satheesan, condemned the treatment of Bindhu and called for a departmental inquiry into police conduct, labelling the incident as one of severe mental torture.

Bindhu stated that after being summoned to the police station, she was not only searched but was also kept in custody overnight without food or water while being verbally abused.

The alleged misconduct by law enforcement ended when the complainants reportedly admitted to finding the missing chain within their own home.

In response, the CMO asserted that appropriate actions were taken following Bindhu's complaints. *—PTI*

PREPAREDNESS ALONG LOC

Amid the ongoing India-Pakistan tension, Army personnel display their preparedness along the LoC during a media tour, at Akhnoor sector in Jammu, on Monday
PHOTO: - PTI

Jammu villages bear brunt of India-Pak conflict

Border tourism in Suchetgarh collapses amid India-Pakistan clashes; locals await peace and revival ***PHOTO: PTI***

Popular for its Wagah-Attari-style structured parade by BSF personnel, the tourist village of Suchetgarh along the International Border on the outskirts of Jammu wears a deserted look these days.

The latest military conflict between India and Pakistan has dealt a body blow to the village, which opened for tourists for the first time in October 2021 as part of the government's border tourism promotion programme.

Stakeholders such as hotel and restaurant owners, shopkeepers and horse carriage operators are worried but also remain hopeful that the understanding between India and Pakistan to stop military actions would hold and play the role of a catalyst for the return of tourists and the accompanying hustle and bustle.

Indian Armed Forces carried out missile strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) on 7 May in retaliation against the Pahalgam attack in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed.

Pakistan responded to the strikes with intense mortar and artillery shelling and drone attacks in Jammu and Kashmir and beyond before the two countries agreed on 10 May to stop the military actions. "Tourist arrivals are at their lowest ebb in view of the recent border clashes. Hardly any tourist visited the zero line in the past week despite the ceasefire announcement," restaurant owner Sunil Kumar told PTI.

Suchetgarh's opened up as a tourist destination after India and Pakistan announced implementation of a renewed ceasefire agreement along the borders in Jammu and Kashmir in February 2021 that came as a major relief to people living along the International Border and the Line of Control (LoC).

India shares a 3,323-kms-long border with Pakistan. Of this, 221kms of the International Border and 744kms of the LoC fall in Jammu and Kashmir.

India and Pakistan had initially signed a ceasefire agreement in 2003 but the neighbouring country frequently violated it, with more than 5,000 violations reported in 2020 -- the highest in a single year. The introduction of the Wagah-Attari-style ceremony, comprising a structured parade by Border Security Force (BSF) personnel on weekends, proved a major attraction for tourists from within and outside Jammu and Kashmir.

The BSF suspended the parade last week following the clashes.

"Earlier, our restaurant used to be packed… Especially on weekends, during the BSF's beating retreat ceremony, our sales touched Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000. Now, we are hardly earning Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000 as people have stopped coming after the Pakistani shelling," Kumar said.

He said they were expecting the revival of border tourism once the situation eased and normality returned.

Mahendra Lal, who runs a tea and sweets shop in the area, said the situation was equally grim for him.

"Our work has come to a standstill and we have stopped manufacturing sweets, including the famous milk cake, owing to a lack of tourists… We used to sell sweets, unlike Pakistan, which is distributing poison," he said. "We only hope that Pakistan shows some wisdom and strengthens peace for better relations."

Teja Singh, who offers horse carriage rides to tourists around the zero line, said his weekend business used to thrive before the recent military standoff.

"Now, the carriages stand idle. No one comes to see the zero line anymore. We are praying that tourists start returning so our livelihood can be restored," said Singh, a local.

A tourism department official said they were monitoring the situation on the borders and expressed hope of a revival of border tourism in the coming weeks.

"The situation along the borders has been peaceful over the past week owing to the ceasefire. We are taking necessary steps, including restarting the BSF parade, to attract tourists once there is permanent peace on the borders," he said. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR ساہر

PUNE PORSCHE CRASH

One year on, victims' families await justice

Exactly a year ago, when a speeding Porsche crashed into a two-wheeler in Pune, killing two techies in their 20s, the accident upended the worlds of their families.

The case grabbed national headlines after it emerged that the luxe car was allegedly being driven by a juvenile under the influence of alcohol and a series of events that followed to save him.

Twelve months have passed, but for the families of victims Anish Awadhiya and his friend Ashwini Costa, justice seems far away.

On the other side, the juvenile's father, who is a developer, two doctors and a few others remain behind bars. The boy's mother is out on interim bail. In the early hours of 19 May, 2024, a Porsche allegedly driven by a 17-year-old in an inebriated condition fatally knocked down software professionals Awadhiya and Costa, who were on a bike, in Pune's Kalyani Nagar area.

Though the boy was detained, he was granted bail by Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) member LN Danavade within hours of the crash. The lenient bail terms, including asking the minor to write a 300-word essay on road safety, triggered a nationwide firestorm.

After police sought a review of the bail order amid the outrage, the JJB sent the minor to an observation home. Subsequently, the Bombay High Court ordered his release.

In a parallel development, Pune police said the boy's blood samples were allegedly replaced with those of his mother to conceal his intoxication at the time of the crash. Police then arrested his parents, two doctors from Sassoon General Hospital and a few others.

Om Awadhiya, father of Anish Awadhiya, expressed dismay over the delay in justice delivery. He said he had been assured that the case would be fast-tracked.

"A year has passed, but the trial is being stretched. Our son is no longer with us; nothing can compensate for that loss, but justice in this case would send a strong message against drunk driving and those who believe money and power put them above the law," he said.

He said both families have appealed to the authorities to expedite the trial.

"This entire year has been painful for me, my wife, and our whole family. Not a single day goes by without us remembering him and cherishing his beautiful memories. After Anish's tragic death, our world has come crashing down," said Om Awadhiya.

The father, who lives in Madhya Pradesh, said their only wish is to see the culprits punished.

Currently, the minor's father, Sassoon doctors Ajay Taware and Shrihari Halnor, hospital staffer Atul Ghatkamble, two middlemen, Bashpak Makandar and Amar Gaikwad, Aditya Avinash Sood, Ashish Mittal, and Arun Kumar Singh are in jail in connection with alleged sample swaps. "The sessions court has rejected the bail pleas of the accused. To ensure that the trial is fast-tracked, we have already filed an application to frame charges. But Dr Taware has moved court seeking to discharge him from the case. That is why the proceedings are pending," said Special Public Prosecutor Shishir Hiray.

He said their priority will be to tackle the discharge application and go for the framing of charges.

Hiray said while opposing the bail applications of the accused, he made the court understand that it was not a simple accident case.

A senior official from Pune police said that, except for the initial probe on 19 May last year, the entire investigation is being carried out in a professional manner to ensure a watertight case against the accused.

According to police, around 2.30am on 19 May, Awadhiya, Costa, and some of their friends were returning home on their bikes from a hotel when a speeding Porsche without a registration number plate rammed into the two-wheeler in Kalyani Nagar, killing Awadhiya and Costa.

The juvenile chose to drive the car after partying at two different hotels with his friends and consuming alcohol, they said.

Following the accident, the juvenile was detained. Initially, police were accused of giving him preferential treatment, prompting Pune police Chief Amitesh Kumar to suspend two cops from the Yerawada police station.

Police said the blood samples of the two other minors, who were in the car, were also reportedly swapped to prevent the detection of alcohol. Police then arrested three people, including the fathers of these two minors.

After the incident, the issue of serving liquor to underage patrons took centre stage as a case was registered against two hotels that had served alcohol to the juvenile and his friends.

– PTI

One year on, justice still eludes Pune Porsche crash victims' families ***PHOTO: PTI***

Threats of severe famine loom large on Gaza now

The crisis in Gaza has reached one of its darkest periods, as Israel blocks all food and supplies from entering the territory and continues an intensifying bombardment campaign.

Humanitarian officials caution that famine threatens to engulf the strip. Doctors say they are out of medicine to treat routine conditions.

Israeli leaders are threatening an even more intense ground offensive. The military is preparing for a new organization with US backing to take over aid delivery, despite alarms raised from humanitarian groups that the plans won't meet the massive need and could place restrictions on those eligible. It's unclear when operations would begin or who would fund them.

Here's what to know about the state of affairs in Gaza.

Israel ended a six-week ceasefire in mid-March and resumed its attacks in Gaza, saying military pressure against Hamas was the best way to push the militant group into freeing more hostages. But ceasefire talks remain deadlocked, and scores of civilians have been killed in Israeli airstrikes.

On Friday, Israeli airstrikes killed 108 — raising the death toll over the past three days to more than 200 Palestinians.

The strikes — often at night, as people sleep in their tents — have directly targeted hospitals, schools, medical clinics, mosques, a Thai restaurant-turned shelter.

Israel says it targets only militants and accuses Hamas of using civilians as human shields.

In the last 10 days of March, UNICEF estimates that an average of 100 children were killed or maimed by Israeli airstrikes every day.

Almost 3,000 of the estimated 53,000 dead since 7 October, 2023, have been killed since Israel broke the ceasefire on March 18, the ministry said.

Israel shows no sign of slowing its operation in Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised this week to use even more force against Hamas, against the objections of families of hostages begging him to agree to a deal instead.

An Israeli official said the strikes Friday were preparatory actions for a larger operation, intended to send a message to Hamas that it will begin soon if there isn't an agreement to release hostages. The official was not authorized to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Hamas still holds 58 of the roughly 250 hostages it took during its attack, with 23 believed to still be alive, although Israeli authorities have expressed concern for the status of three.

Gaza faces catastrophic famine as Israel blocks aid and intensifies deadly bombardment campaign ***PHOTO: PTI***

No food has entered Gaza for 75 days, and Palestinians go hungry

Israel has blocked food, water and supplies from reaching Gaza — where the UN says the entire population is reliant on aid — for more than two months. Most community kitchens have shut down.

The main food providers inside Gaza — the UN's World Food Program and World Central Kitchen — say they are out of food. Vegetables and meat are inaccessible or unaffordable. Palestinians queue for hours for a small scoop of rice.

Nearly half a million Palestinians face possible starvation — living in "catastrophic" levels of hunger — and 1 million others can barely get enough food, according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a leading international authority on the severity of hunger crises.

Satellite photos obtained by The Associated Press show what appear to be Israeli preparations for a new aid distribution program in Gaza, one that has come under heavy criticism from aid workers.

Satellite photos from 10 May show four bases in southern Gaza — two that are newly built in the last month and two that have been enhanced.

One, at the southwestern corner of Gaza, has been fortified with new walls. A new road connects the base to a sandy expanse of newly bulldozed land. Another base, in the center of Gaza, appears to have been fortified with new defensive sand berms. Adjacent is a newly bulldozed lot.

– PTI

PHOTO: X

ATC breakdown delays flights at Paris-Orly airport

PARIS, 19 MAY

Flights at Paris-Orly airport are still experiencing cancellations and delays following a significant breakdown in air traffic control systems over the weekend. France's civil aviation authority, DGAC, reported that the situation is improving, with a flight reduction of 15 per cent on Monday, compared to a 40 per cent cut on Sunday. Despite these measures, the authority warned that delays are likely to persist. Specific reasons for the breakdown have not been disclosed. Notably, flights to Italy, Spain, Portugal, and southern France were cancelled on Monday. Last year, Paris-Orly airport accommodated over 33 million passengers, roughly half the traffic of Paris-Charles-de-Gaulle, as reported by Aeroport de Paris. *—PTI*

57 killed in militant attacks on two villages in Nigeria

ABUJA, 19 MAY

A suspected militant assault in Nigeria's northeast has resulted in at least 57 fatalities and over 70 individuals reported missing, marking one of the deadliest incidents this year. Survivors from Baga in Borno State revealed that the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS) faction of Boko Haram abducted more than 100 villagers, accusing them of being informants for the rival Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). With most victims found with their throats slit, local residents expressed concern over further casualties, as military support for body searches was unavailable. This attack follows a concerning rise in violence, including an ISWAP assault on a Nigerian Army battalion and multiple roadside bombings. *—PTI*

Lightning kills 3 at Cambodia's Angkor Wat

BANGKOK, 19 MAY

A lightning strike at Cambodia's Angkor Wat temple complex has resulted in the deaths of three people and several injuries. The victims were sheltering near the main temple when the storm hit late Friday afternoon. Eyewitness footage shows ambulances responding to the scene, with bystanders assisting the injured. Following the tragedy, Cambodia's Minister of Tourism, Hout Hak, urged the removal of online posts regarding the incident, cautioning that negative coverage could harm the country's vital tourism sector.
While authorities have remained tight-lipped, an anonymous official confirmed that all three deceased were Cambodian nationals. *—PTI*

Russia outlaws Amnesty International

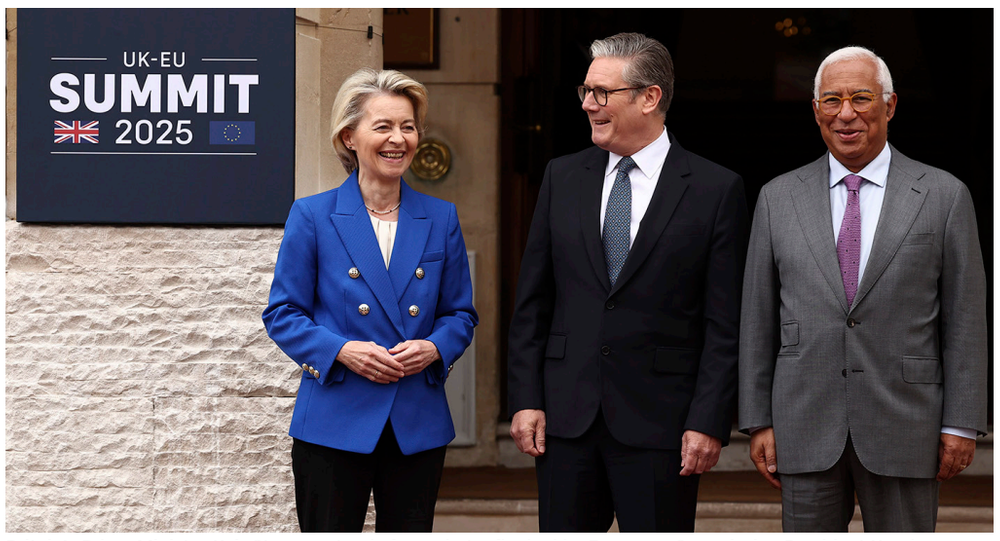
MOSCOW, 19 MAY

The Russian authorities on Monday outlawed Amnesty International as an "undesirable organisation," a label that under a 2015 law makes involvement with such organisations a criminal offense. The decision by the Russian Prosecutor General's office is the latest in the unrelenting crackdown on Kremlin critics, journalists and activists that intensified to unprecedented levels after Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022. The designation means the international human rights group must stop any work in Russia and it subjects those who cooperate with it or support it to prosecution. Russia's list of "undesirable organisations" currently covers 223 entities, including prominent independent news outlets and rights groups. Amnesty International did not immediately comment on the move. *—PTI*

UK, EU begin afresh with new pacts 5yrs post Brexit

Deals include 150B Euro defence pact and restarting fishing

LONDON, 19 MAY



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer stands for a photo, flanked by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa, ahead of a United Kingdom and European Union summit at Lancaster Housein London on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Britain and the European Union hailed a new chapter in their relationship after they sealed new agreements on defence cooperation and easing trade flows at their first formal summit since Brexit.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who met European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and other senior EU officials in London, said the deals will slash red tape, grow the British economy and reset relations with the 27-nation trade bloc since the UK left the EU in 2020. "Britain is back on the world stage," Starmer said.

"This deal is a win-win." Under the deals, a new UK-EU defence and security partnership will allow the UK to access a EU defence loan programme worth 150 billion euros.

The defence pact will allow Britain's defence industry to access cheap loans from a new EU loan programme to buy military equipment, in part to help Ukraine defend itself.

Other agreements include removing some checks on animal and plant products to ease food trade across borders, and a 12-year extension of an agreement allowing EU fishing vessels in UK waters.

In trade, officials say they will reduce routine border checks and costs on some food imports and exports to make it easier for goods to flow freely. The changes will mean the UK can sell products like British burgers and sausages to the EU again, officials said.

The deal also means European fishing boats will have access to UK waters until 2038. While economically minor, fishing has long been a sticking point and symbolically important issue for the UK and EU member states such as France.

Von der Leyen called the talks a "historic moment" that benefits both sides.

More broadly, she said it sends a message at a time of global upheaval that the UK and EU are "natural partners standing side-by-side on the global stage".

Britain's Opposition parties however slammed the deals as backtracking on Brexit. "We're becoming a rule-taker from Brussels once again," Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch alleged. *—PTI*

FAMINE ALERT

Palestinians fleeing Beit Lahia amid ongoing Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip arrive in Jabalia on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

Israel agrees to allow limited aid into Gaza

DEIR AL-BALAH/TEL AVIV, 19 MAY

Israel announced on Sunday it will allow a limited amount of humanitarian aid into Gaza after a nearly three-month blockade, days after global experts on food security warned of famine.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said a "starvation crisis" would jeopardise Israel's new military offensive in Gaza, and his Cabinet approved a decision to allow a "basic" amount of food for the 2 million people.

In a video statement posted to social media, Netanyahu said that Israel's allies voiced concern about "images of hunger".

Israel's "greatest friends in the world", he said without mentioning specific nations, said there is "one thing we cannot stand. We cannot accept images of hunger, mass hunger. We will not be able to support you".

Netanyahu said, "therefore to achieve victory, we need to somehow solve the problem." The aid would be "minimal", he added.

It was not immediately clear when aid would enter Gaza, or how. The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation said its four aid distribution sites would be up and running before the end of the month.

But international aid groups said the mechanism is not practical and won't reach the most vulnerable Palestinians. *—PTI*

FIRST VISITS

Pope Leo XIV stands for a photo flanked by Vice President JD Vance and his wife Usha Vance on the left and Secretary of State Marco Rubio and his wife Jeanette Dousdebes Rubio at the Vatican on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Trump miffed at Zelenskyy, Putin ahead of peace talks

WASHINGTON, 19 MAY

President Donald Trump has grown "frustrated" with Russian leader Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the White House said on Monday ahead of separate calls Trump is holding in hopes of making progress toward a ceasefire in the war in Ukraine.

Trump expressed his hopes for a "productive day" on Monday – and a ceasefire – in a social media post over the weekend.

His effort will also include calls to NATO leaders. But ahead of the call, Vice President JD Vance said Trump is "more than open" to walking away from trying to end the war if he feels Putin isn't serious about negotiation.

The call was underway shortly after 10 a.m., press secretary Karoline Leavitt said, promising additional details after it concludes.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the conversation "important, given the talks that took place in Istanbul" last week between Russian and Ukrainian officials, the first such negotiations since March 2022.

Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin

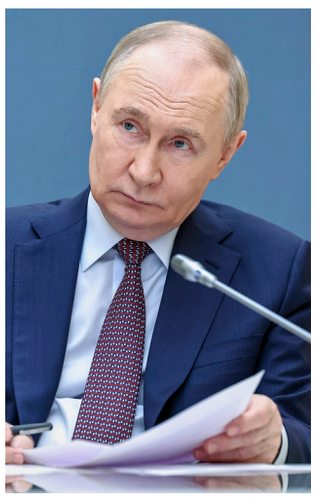


PHOTO: PTI

Trump has struggled to end a war that began with Russia's invasion in February 2022, and that makes these conversations a serious test of his reputation as a deal maker after having claimed he would quickly settle the conflict once he was back in the White House, if not even before he took office.

"He's grown weary and frustrated with both sides of the conflict," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters Monday ahead of the call. "He has made it clear to both sides that he wants to see a peaceful resolution and ceasefire as soon as possible.". *—PTI*

PRO-EU CANDIDATE DAN IN LEAD IN ROMANIA'S PREZ POLL

BUCHAREST, 18 MAY

In a pivotal presidential runoff, pro-European Union candidate Nicusor Dan, the incumbent Bucharest Mayor, has emerged victorious over hard-right nationalist George Simion, according to nearly complete electoral data. With 10.5 million of 11.6 million votes counted, Dan leads with 54.32 per cent to Simion's 45.68 per cent .

The election followed the annulment of a previous vote, plunging Romania into a political crisis. Higher voter turnout, at 64 per cent compared to 53 per cent in the first round, played a crucial role in the outcome. Addressing supporters, Dan emphasised the need for change in Romanian society while acknowledging the community of voters dissatisfied with the current political landscape. *—PTI*

Four dead, 20 injured in blast in Balochistan

KARACHI, 19 MAY

A series of violent incidents marred Pakistan recently, with a bomb explosion in Balochistan and the killing of a doctor from the Ahmadi minority community.

On Sunday, a bomb detonated near Jabbar Market in the Killa Abdullah district of Balochistan, killing four people and injuring 20 others. The blast, which caused significant damage and ignited fires in the vicinity, led to a brief exchange of gunfire between assailants and Frontier Corps personnel. The region has been troubled by unrest for two decades due to local grievances over the exploitation of its mineral wealth.

In a separate incident in Sargodha, a city in eastern Pakistan, Dr Sheikh Mahmood, an Ahmadi physician, was shot dead at a private hospital on Friday. The attacker escaped, and police have intensified their search for the suspect. Ahmadis face ongoing persecution in Pakistan, where they are deemed non-Muslims since 1974. The motive for Dr Mahmood's killing remains unclear, but it adds to a worrying trend of violence against the Ahmadi community, with three such attacks reported since April.

Both incidents highlight the escalating violence and insecurity faced by various communities in Pakistan. *—PTI*

Pak faces hunger crisis: Report

ISLAMABAD, 19 MAY

PHOTO: X

Pakistan faced high levels of food insecurity from November 2024 to March 2025, with over one crore people projected to face insecurity, the country publication Dawn reported, citing the Food and Agriculture Organization's most recent study.

Dawn reported that 11 million people or 22 per cent of the analysed population are projected to face acute food insecurity in 68 flood-affected rural districts across Balochistan, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Of them, 2.2 million were in emergency under the Integrated Food Insecurity Phase Classification (IPC) during November 2023 to January 2024.

The population coverage increased by 38 per cent between the 2024 peak and 2025 current analysis, from 36.7 million people to 50.8 million people, with 25 additional districts, making the 2024 peak and the projection for 2025 not comparable, Dawn said. This includes 1.7 million in emergency. *—Agencies*

MALIGNANCY ENTERS BONE

Biden diagnosed with prostate cancer

WASHINGTON, 19 MAY

Former US president Joe Biden was diagnosed with prostate cancer, his office said Sunday.

Biden was seen by doctors last week after urinary symptoms and a prostate nodule were found. He was diagnosed with prostate cancer on Friday, with the cancer cells having spread to the bone.

"While this represents a more aggressive form of the disease, the cancer appears to be hormone-sensitive which allows for effective management," his office said.

Prostate cancers are given a score called a Gleason score that measures, on a scale of 1 to 10, how the cancerous cells look compared with normal cells. Biden's office said his score was 9, suggesting his cancer is among the most aggressive.

When prostate cancer spreads to other parts of the body, it often spreads to the bones. Metastasised cancer is much harder to treat than localised cancer because it can be hard for drugs to reach all the tumours and completely root out the disease.

However, when prostate cancers need hormones to grow, as in Biden's case, they can be susceptible to treatment that deprives the tumours of hormones.

Many political leaders sent Biden their wishes for his recovery. President Donald Trump posted on social media that he was saddened by the news and "we wish Joe a fast and successful recovery."

Biden's vice president, Kamala Harris, said on social media that she was keeping him in her family's "hearts and prayers during this time."

"Joe is a fighter — and I know he will face this challenge with the same strength, resilience, and optimism that have always defined his life and leadership," Harris wrote.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also wished Biden a "quick and full recovery."

In a post on X, Modi wrote, "Deeply concerned to hear about Biden's health. Extend our best wishes to him for a quick and full recovery. Our thoughts are with Dr. Jill Biden and the family."

Aged 82, Biden's health was a dominant concern among voters during his time as president. *—PTI*

MILEI DOMINATES LOCAL POLLS IN ARGENTINA

BUENOS, 19 MAY

In a significant shift for Argentine politics, Javier Milei's radical libertarian party, La Libertad Avanza, secured a decisive victory in the Buenos Aires elections, overshadowing the traditional centre-right dominance of Mauricio Macri's PRO party. Manuel Adorni, Milei's spokesperson and top candidate, garnered over 30 per cent of the vote, doubling the support of his party from the previous local election.

The PRO, which has held power in Buenos Aires for the last 18 years, suffered a crushing defeat, with Silvia Lospennato coming in third at 15.9 per cent . The left-leaning Peronist party, typically weaker in the capital, achieved a surprising 27 per cent.

"This election confirms we end Kirchnerism," Adorni stated, referencing the legacy of former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

Milei's win positions him ahead of crucial midterm elections in October, where he aims to bolster his congressional representation amidst ongoing tensions with Macri. The rivalry intensified after a deepfake incident involving Macri, highlighting the increasingly contentious political landscape as Milei's anti-establishment movement gains traction. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Gold price rises ₹ 580 to ₹ 97,030/10g

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

Gold prices rallied ₹580 to ₹97,030 per 10g in the national capital on Monday amid strong trends in the international markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. On Friday, gold of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at ₹96,450 per 10g. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity climbed Rs 580 to Rs 96,580 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes) on Monday. It had settled at ₹96,000 per 10g in the previous market session. Meanwhile, the most traded contract for gold futures rallied ₹1,182 or 1.28 per cent to trade at ₹ 93,623 per 10g on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX). Spot gold went up by USD 39.05 or 1.22 per cent to USD 3,241.82 per ounce. —*PTI*

Rupee rises 17P to close at 85.4 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 19 MAY

The rupee appreciated 17 paise to settle at 85.40 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, on weak US dollar index and a decline in crude oil prices. Forex traders said global investors were also cautious as global rating agency Moody's downgraded US investment grade rating, leading to a fall in dollar index. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.43 and moved between the intra-day high of 85.35 and the low of 85.61 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.40, registering a gain of 17 paise over its previous closing level. On Friday, the rupee pared its gains and settled 3 paise lower at 85.57 against the dollar. —*PTI*

Rippling opens second office in Bengaluru

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

San Francisco-based business software firm Rippling has announced the opening of its second office in Bengaluru. Located at Embassy Tech Village, the new 1,00,000 sq ft facility will host teams across engineering, product, sales, and customer support. Rippling, currently valued at USD 16.8 billion, stated it intends to double its India workforce from 1,000 to 2,000 over the next three years. The Bengaluru operation is Rippling's largest outside its San Francisco headquarters and plays a key role in developing core product initiatives. Founded in 2016, the company has a global presence with offices in San Francisco, New York, Austin, London, Dublin, Sydney, and Bengaluru. —*PTI*

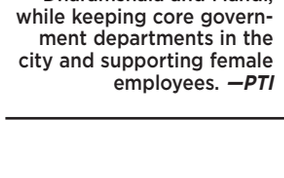


PHOTO: PTI

Imports hurting Himachal's apple industry: Sukhu

SHIMLA, 19 MAY

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said he will write to the Centre and the Prime Minister, urging a ban on apple imports from Turkey. He said growers in Himachal and Jammu & Kashmir are struggling to get fair because of cheaper imports from Turkey and the US, despite years of hard work. Sukhu plans to raise the issue personally with the Prime Minister at the 24 May meeting of Chief Ministers. Valued at Rs 4,500 crore, the apple industry is vital to the state's economy. He also announced plans to decongest Shimla by shifting regulatory offices to Dharamshala and Mandi, while keeping core government departments in the city and supporting female employees. —*PTI*

Markets close lower for 2nd day

Investor sentiment took a hit after Moody's downgraded the US sovereign

MUMBAI, 19 MAY

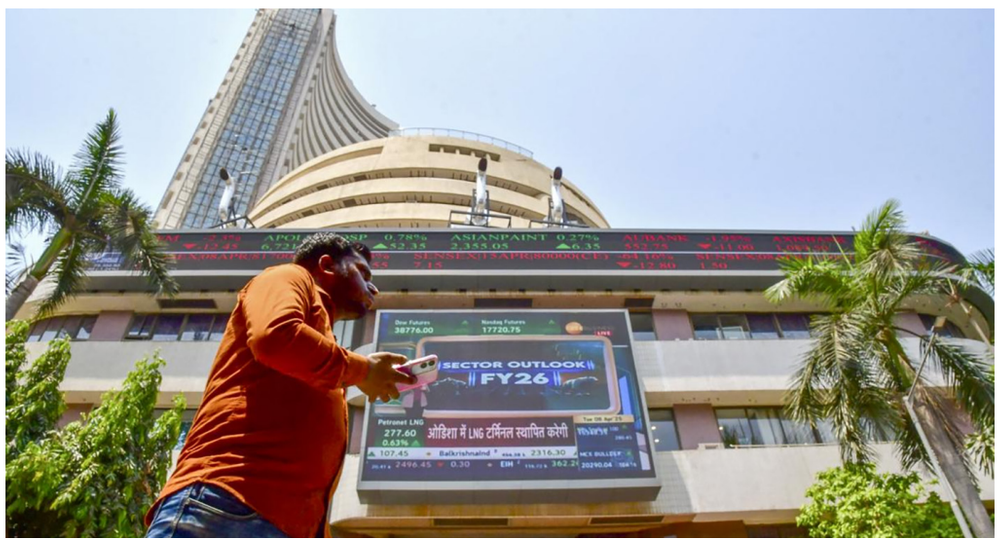
Benchmark BSE Sensex dropped by 271 points on Monday, marking the second straight day of losses due to selling in IT and banking stocks and a weak trend in global markets after rating downgrade of the US by Moody's Ratings.

The 30-share BSE barometer declined 271.17 points or 0.33 per cent to settle at 82,059.42. During the day, it dropped 366.02 points or 0.44 per cent to a low of 81,964.57.

The NSE Nifty dipped 74.35 points or 0.30 per cent to 24,945.45.

Among Sensex firms, Eternal, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries, Asian Paints, HCL Tech and Adani Ports were the laggards.

Power Grid, Bajaj Finance, NTPC, State Bank of India and IndusInd Bank were among the gainers.



Power Grid, Bajaj Finance, NTPC, State Bank of India and IndusInd Bank were among the gainers PHOTO: PTI

Among sectors, realty, pharma, and auto shares advanced while IT declined by over a percent. "Markets languished in negative territory for major part of the trading session as weak Asian and European indices resulted in investors resorting to profit-taking in IT, capital goods and oil & gas shares," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Also Moody's downgrading US credit rating by a notch over the weekend created some sort of uncertainty amongst investors, Tapse added.

Investor sentiment took a hit after Moody's downgraded the US sovereign credit rating to 'Aa1', citing the nation's surging USD 36 trillion debt, he said.

"Global markets echoed this nervousness. Asian and European equities traded mostly lower..." Garg added.

The broader market witnessed a mixed performance as the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.75 per cent and midcap index ended up by 0.27 per cent.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.41 per cent to USD 65.14 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 8,831.05 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. —*PTI*

SBI CUTS FIXED DEPOSIT RATES BY 20 BPS

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

Country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) has cut fixed deposit rates by 20 basis points across tenors effective 16 May.

As per the bank's website, the cut in interest rates on retail domestic term deposits below Rs 3 crore is applicable for both general public and senior citizens.

Deposits for 2 years to less than 3 years, gives the maximum interest to investors at 6.7 per cent, followed by 3 years to less than 5 years, which gives 6.55 per cent interest from 16 May.

Fixed deposits of 5 years to 10 years now get interest of 6.30 per cent for general public, while it is 6.5 per cent for deposits of duration 1 year to less than 2 years. The interest rate of specific tenor scheme of "Amrit Vrishti"(444 days) has also been revised from 7.05 per cent to 6.85 per cent effective 16. — *PTI*

UCO Bank's ex-CMD arrested for laundering of over ₹ 6.2K

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday said it has arrested former UCO Bank CMD Subodh Kumar Goel on money laundering charges in an alleged bank loan fraud case of more than Rs 6,200 crore linked to a Kolkata-based company.

Goel was arrested from his residence in the national capital on 16 May in the case being probed against Concast Steel and Power Ltd (CSPL) and others.

He was produced before the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Kolkata on 17 May, which sent him to ED custody till 21 May, the federal probe agency said in a statement.

The ED had raided the premises of Goel and some others in April as part of this investigation.

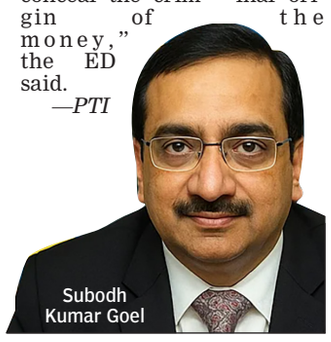
The money laundering case stems from a CBI FIR related to the sanction of credit facilities to the CSPL and subsequent large-scale "diversion" and "siphoning" of loans amounting to Rs 6,210.72 crore (principle amount without interest).

The ED claimed that during the tenure of Goel as the CMD of UCO Bank, large credit facilities were "sanctioned" to the CSPL which were subsequently "diverted" and "siphoned off" by the borrower group.

In turn, it alleged, Goel received "substantial illegal gratification" from the CSPL.

"The illegal gratification was layered and channelled through various entities to give a facade of legitimacy.

"Investigation revealed that Goel received cash, immovable properties, luxury goods, hotel booking etc routed through a web of shell companies, dummy persons and through family members to conceal the criminal origin of the money," the ED said. —*PTI*



Subodh Kumar Goel

SIX FIRMS EYE ₹11K CR FROM IPO IN MAY

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

After a tepid start to 2025, the IPO market is getting back on track with six main-board companies are set to float their initial share-sales this month to collectively mobilise over Rs 11,000 crore, investment banking sources said on Monday.

Of the six firms, Borana Weaves and Belrise Industries will launch their IPOs this week. It will float its Rs 144-crore IPO on 20 May, while Pune-based Belrise Industries' Rs 2,150-crore IPO will open on 21 May.

The remaining four companies – Schloss Bangalore Ltd, Aegis Vopak Terminals, Arisinfra Solutions Ltd and Scoda Tubes are expected to file their IPOs next week.

Moreover, the firms will announce their price bands this week, the investment banking sources said. Together, these six companies are expected to raise Rs 11,669 crore.

Meanwhile, the listing process of Coal India Ltd's two subsidiaries – BCCL and CMPDI – has begun and draft papers would be filed soon with Sebi, the company on Monday said.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of CII Mining and Construction Equipment Summit, Coal India Ltd Director Business Development Debasish Nanda said. —*PTI*

India eyes rape-seed meal export revival

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

India is aiming to regain its market share in China's rapeseed meal imports, taking advantage of the commodity's lower price as compared to the international rate amid global supply constraints, the Solvent Extractors' Association (SEA) said on Monday.

Indian rapeseed meal is trading at USD 202 per tonne (Ex-Kandla FAS) as compared to international price of USD 308 per tonne (Ex-Hamburg). This creates a compelling opportunity for Indian exporters.

The SEA has urged the Ministry of Commerce to negotiate with Chinese authorities for relaxed import conditions.

Currently, only three Indian facilities registered with China's General Administration of Customs are permitted to export rapeseed meal to the Chinese market, the SEA said in a statement.

China, a major consumer of rapeseed meal for animal feed, sources most imports from Canada and the European Union, where supplies have tightened and the prices have risen.

"Given the prevailing supply constraints and rising costs, India now has a valuable opportunity to regain its foothold in the Chinese market, if China relaxes its stringent import conditions on Indian rapeseed meal," the industry body said.

Meanwhile, India's oilmeal export sector faces growing competition from Distillers Dried Grains with Solubles (DDGS), an ethanol by-product increasingly used as a protein-rich alternative in cattle and poultry feed formulations.

"The DDGS is now part of the supply chain and the industry will have to adapt its business accordingly," the SEA said, noting that DDGS partially substitutes traditional ingredients like soybean meal, rapeseed meal and de-oiled rice bran in feed. —*PTI*

Qatar Airways reports $2.15B profit

DUBAI, 19 MAY

The holding company that owns Qatar Airways reported on Monday it earned a USD 2.15 billion profit in its last fiscal year, its highest-ever profit off the back of record passenger numbers as global aviation bounces back after the coronavirus pandemic.

The state-owned carrier reported revenues of USD 23.4 billion overall in the results, up from USD 22.1 billion the year before. Its fiscal year profits in the prior reporting period were USD 1.6 billion.

"These record-breaking results are a testament to the hard work, skill and dedication of teams across all of Qatar Airways Group," said group CEO Badr Mohammed al-Meer in a statement.

Qatar Airways, along with Abu Dhabi-based Emirates and Dubai's Emirates, are long-haul carriers that link East-West travel.

Their location on the Arabian Peninsula between Europe and Asia have made them a key link in global transit. Qatar Airways also got a boost when the small, energy-rich nation hosted soccer's 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Qatar Airways, whose fleet includes over 230 aircraft, reported carrying 43.1 million passengers, up from the prior financial year's 40 million. —*PTI*

Sebi issues ₹2.1 cr notice to Mehul Choksi

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

Markets regulator Sebi has sent a notice to absconding diamantaire Mehul Choksi asking him to pay Rs 2.1 crore in a case of violation of insider trading rules in the shares of Gitanjali Gems Ltd and warned of attachment of assets as well as bank accounts if he fails to make the payment within 15 days.

The demand notice came after Choksi failed to pay the fine imposed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) in January 2022.

Choksi, who was the chairman and managing director as well as part of promoter group of Gitanjali Gems, is the maternal uncle of Nirav Modi. Both are facing charges of defrauding state-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB) of more than Rs 14,000 crore. Choksi and Modi fled India after the PNB scam came to light in early 2018.

Last month, Choksi was arrested in Belgium following an extradition request by Indian probe agencies. He was located in Belgium last year when he went there on the grounds of getting medical treatment. He had been staying in Antigua since 2018 after leaving India.

Modi was arrested by the Scotland Yard Police in March 2019 and is currently lodged in jail in that country. In a fresh recovery notice dated 15 May, the Sebi directed Choksi to pay Rs 2.1 crore within 15 days. —*PTI*

India's High Commissioner to Maldives G Balasubramanian and Maldives Minister of Foreign Affairs of Abdulla Khaleel at the signing of 13 MoUs between the two countries for projects under the Indian grant assistance scheme PHOTO: PTI

India, Maldives sign 13 MoUs of ₹ 55.28 crore

MALE, 19 MAY

- The MoUs were signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the Maldivian government, and G Balasubramanian, the High Commissioner of India to the Maldives

India has signed 13 MoUs with the Maldives for enhancing ferry services in the island nation with an MVR 100 million grant, expanding maritime connectivity and uplifting community livelihoods.

The MoUs signed on Sunday are for projects under the Indian grant assistance scheme—High Impact Community Development Project (HICDP) Phase III. The signing ceremony took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, marking another milestone in the ever-strengthening partnership between the two countries, the Maldives' Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

The 13 projects launched under this phase amount to MVR 100 million (about Rs 55,28,47,552), primarily aimed at enhancing ferry services in the Maldives, expanding connectivity, and uplifting community livelihoods, it said.

The MoUs were signed by Abdulla Khaleel, Minister of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the Maldivian government, and G Balasubramanian, the High Commissioner of India to the Maldives. Mohamed Ameen, Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation, signed on behalf of the implementing agency. He noted that the MoUs signed today with India will further expand these services, reinforcing the strong bilateral ties between the two countries. Although initially scheduled for completion in 2027, the project is now expected to be finalised by the end of this year. —*PTI*

3 MORE CITIES NEXT

Delhi Metro ticketing goes live on Uber app

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

Ride-hailing platform Uber on Monday announced the roll-out of metro ticketing on the Uber app, powered by the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), starting with Delhi Metro.

Three more cities are slated to go live in 2025, Uber said, adding it will soon launch B2B Logistics via the ONDC network, a solution that will allow businesses to request on-demand logistics from Uber's delivery network, without needing their own fleet.

This move follows a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2024 during Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi's visit to India, where Uber committed to collaborating with ONDC to advance the reach and impact of India's digital public goods.

Praveen Neppalli Naga, Chief Technology Officer, Uber, said "India has taken an impressive leap in building population scale technology through its Digital Public Infrastructure like ONDC and we are thrilled to integrate with them to bring metro ticketing to the Uber app, bringing us one step closer to our vision of being a one-stop shop for mobility needs."

This move follows a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2024 during Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi's visit to India, where Uber committed to collaborating with ONDC to advance the reach and impact of India's digital public goods PHOTO: PTI

Vibhor Jain, Acting CEO and COO at ONDC termed Uber joining the ONDC Network as a significant step in expanding access to trusted, interoperable digital infrastructure in India.

Beginning today, Uber users in the national capital will be able to plan their metro journeys, purchase QR-based tickets, and access real-time transit information, within the Uber app. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Ben Stokes quits alcohol for injury rehab

LONDON, 19 MAY

England's Test captain Ben Stokes has decided to abstain from alcohol during his rehabilitation for a hamstring injury, aiming to be fit for the upcoming Ashes series against Australia. The 33-year-old recovered from surgery on his left hamstring, sustained during a Test against New Zealand last year. Stokes shared that he stopped drinking on 2 January, believing that it would expedite his recovery. Reflecting on his past injuries, he remarked, "After my first major injury... I was thinking, 'How has this happened?' and wondered if drinking had played a part." Stokes, who recently formed a partnership with CleanCo, a zero-alcohol spirits, stated he won't remain completely sober but is focused on returning to the field. *—PTI*

Ex-footballer to quit from BBC after Zionism post row

LONDON, 19 MAY

Gary Lineker, the former England soccer player and now a media celebrity, will step down from the BBC following backlash over a social media post he shared on Zionism. The 64-year-old, who earns £1.3 million annually as the broadcaster's top-paid presenter, reposted an Instagram story from the group Palestine Lobby. The post, titled 'Zionism explained in two minutes', included an image of a rat — a symbol historically used in antisemitic propaganda, notably by the Nazis. Lineker was due to leave Match of the Day at the end of this season but planned to continue with other football coverage, including the 2026 World Cup. On Monday, however, he confirmed he will leave the BBC. *—PTI*

Indo-British Rai is 19th in PGA championship

CHARLOTTE, 19 MAY

Indo-British golfer Aaron Rai sealed a commendable performance at the PGA Championship, finishing tied for 19th after carding a final round of 69, totalling two-under 282 across the tournament. This marked the best finish among the three players with Indian connections in the event, as Akshay Bhatia failed to make the cut and Sahith Theegala withdrew due to a neck strain. Rai's season has been solid, having made 11 cuts out of 13 starts, with seven finishes within the Top-25, although he has yet to secure a Top-10 finish, previously placing T-27 at the Masters. In the lead, Scottie Scheffler claimed his third Major title, winning the PGA by five shots with a closing score of 11-under 273. *—PTI*

Diksha Dagar finishes tied-9th at Dutch Ladies Open

HILVERSUM, 19 MAY

Indian golfer Diksha Dagar secured a commendable tied-ninth finish at the Dutch Ladies Open, part of the Ladies European Tour, with a final round score of 71, bringing her total to 4-under 212. The 24-year-old recorded consistent rounds of 71, 70, and 71 over three days, marking her fourth top-10 finish in the tour. Fellow Indian rookies Hitaashee Bakshi and Avani Prashanth also performed well, finishing tied-12th and tied-19th, respectively. In a thrilling finale, England's Mimi Rhodes claimed her third LET title, finishing two shots clear of the field with a three-under 69. With this victory, Rhodes solidifies her lead in the Order of Merit standings. *—PTI*

AMID INDO-PAK ROW, BCCI 'PULLS OUT' OF ASIA CUP

BCCI secretary says reports are speculative

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

In an attempt to isolate Pakistan cricket in view of the ongoing Indo-Pak tension, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has decided to boycott all tournaments organised by the Asian Cricket Council (ACC).

Media reports said the BCCI has conveyed its decision to ACC to withdraw from the next month's Women's Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Sri Lanka and the Men's Asia Cup to be hosted by India in September.

The BCCI said it was prompted to make the decision as the ACC is currently headed by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman and that country's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

"The Indian team can't play in a tournament that is organised by the ACC whose chief is a Pakistan minister. That's the sentiment of the nation. We have verbally communicated to ACC about our withdrawal from the upcoming Women's Emerging Teams Asia Cup, and our future participation in their events too is on hold. We are in constant touch with the Indian government," a BCCI was quoted as saying.

PHOTO: X

The BCCI's move also left a question mark on the Asia Cup tournament, which is not feasible without the presence of Team India and will barely have any significance without an India-Pakistan game.

On Monday, the BCCI also termed as "speculative and imaginary" the report which claimed that it has decided to pull out of men's Asia Cup and women's Emerging Teams Asia Cup.

A media report, quoting sources, had said that BCCI will not let Indian teams compete in the two Asian Cricket Council (ACC) events at a time when the cricket body is being headed by a Pakistani and just days back the two neighbouring nations were involved in a military conflict.

Pakistan's interior minister Mohsin Naqvi, who is also PCB Chairman, holds the position of President in the ACC. *—Agencies*

Rebuild in focus as CSK, RR battle for pride

Tuesday's match is the last of the 2025 edition for the Royals **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

The contest between laggards Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals holds no significance in the context of the play-offs, but both teams will aim to accelerate their rebuilding process with the MS Dhoni-led side looking to transform itself from a 'dad's army' into a young brigade.

Tuesday's match is the last of the 2025 edition for the Royals, who have nothing to savour except finding exceptional talent in Vaibhav Suryavanshi, who forced the cricket world to take note of his unexpected coruscating show.

The bad bowling picks at the auction has hurt the RR the most, apart from a non-impressive show by the middle order.

If they are at number nine in the table out of 10 teams, mostly it has been because of a mediocre show by their bowlers and over dependence on top order batters.

Letting go of Jos Buttler from the squad and not-so-impressive show from Jofra Archer left the Royals with plenty to contend with.

The formula of packing the side with and relying on tried-and-tested players has proven outdated, severely hampering Chennai Super King's performance this season.

CSK have expected too much from Rahul Tripathy and Deepak Hooda. Their India experience might have earned them contracts with the franchise but they could never be the consistent match winners.

The rebuilding process has started with the infusion of young blood like Ayush Mhatre, Shaik Rasheed, and Urvil Patel. The 20-year-old Mhatre came close to hitting a century against RCB and also did well against SRH and MI. *—PTI*

KKR, RCB pick replacements for two players

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bengaluru have picked Shivam Shukla and Blessing Muzarabani as replacements for their injured players, the IPL said on Monday. Defending champions KKR, who are already out of playoffs reckoning, have signed Shukla as a replacement for Rovman Powell. The West Indian all-rounder needs a surgical intervention of his tonsils. Leg spinner Shukla plays for Madhya Pradesh in domestic cricket and will join KKR for Rs 30 lakh. RCB, meanwhile, have picked Muzarabani as replacement for Lungisani Ngidi, who will leave the franchise to join the South African team for national duties. The replacement will be effective from 26 May. *—PTI*

Sindhu, Prannoy eye recovery in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, 19 MAY

Star Indian shuttlers PV Sindhu and HS Prannoy will look to script a turnaround in fortunes when they lead the country's campaign at the USD 4,75,000 Malaysia Masters Super 500 tournament beginning Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday.

Both players have endured a tough phase of late, struggling with form and fitness. The duo lost their respective matches against Indonesia and Denmark in the Sudirman Cup last month – their last competitive outing.

With a two-week break under their belt, the experienced shuttlers will now be eager to rediscover their rhythm at the Axiata Arena.

PV Sindhu and HS Prannoy have struggled with fitness **PHOTO: X**

Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu, currently ranked world number 16, will open her campaign against Japan's Natsuki Nidaira, ranked 20th in the world.

Prannoy, who has slipped to world number 35, faces a tough opener against fifth seed Kenta Nishimoto of Japan.

In women's singles, 2024 Hylo Open runner-up Malvika Bansod will take on Chiu Pin-Chian of Chinese Taipei, while Unnati Hooda — a semifinalist at the Taipei Open Super 300 — will face compatriot Lin Hsiang Ti.

Aakarshi Kashyap has drawn eighth seed Putri Kusuma Wardani of Indonesia.

In men's singles, Sathish Karunakaran, champion at the 2023 Odisha Masters and 2024 Guwahati Masters, will take on top seed Anders Antonsen of Denmark.

World junior championships bronze medallist Ayush Shetty, who reached the Taipei Open semifinals, will face Canada's Brian Yang, while Priyanshu Rajawat opens against Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh. *—PTI*

Neeraj Chopra broke mental barrier, aimed higher: Gagan Narang

NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

Gagan Narang **PHOTO: X**

Superstar Neeraj Chopra has shattered the 90-metre "mental barrier" with a remarkable throw of 90.23 metres at the Doha Diamond League, according to Olympic medallist shooter Gagan Narang. This achievement marks a significant milestone in Indian athletics, empowering Chopra to push his limits further as he gears up for major competitions, including the upcoming World Championships.

Narang hailed Chopra's feat as "absolutely phenomenal," emphasising its importance in redefining what is achievable for Indian sport on a global level. Although Chopra finished second to Germany's Julian Weber, who threw 91.06 metres, Narang believes that breaking the mental barrier is crucial for building the confidence necessary for future successes. Drawing on his own experiences in shooting, where he pursued the elusive perfect score, Narang noted that such milestones require a strong mindset to surpass perceived limits. He expressed optimism about India's athletics future, despite concerns about the gap between Chopra and his fellow competitors, suggesting that his success will inspire others to rise to the challenge. Narang also discussed an upcoming shooting league set to launch in November 2025, highlighting its potential to enhance Indian shooting. *—PTI*

Neeraj Chopra **PHOTO: PTI**

Reeling Inter Miami must stick together: Messi after loss

FORT LAUDERDALE, 19 MAY

After Inter Miami's disappointing 3-0 defeat to Orlando, Lionel Messi, the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner and 2022 World Cup champion, stressed the importance of team unity during this challenging period. Speaking to Apple TV, Messi expressed his belief that now is the time to prove their mettle as a cohesive unit.

"It's a difficult time, but we're going to come through this," Messi stated in Spanish. "When everything is going well, it's easy, but in tough times like these, we must be more united than ever."

Following the loss, Inter Miami's record slid to 1-5-1 in their last seven matches, bringing their overall season tally to 6-3-4 in Major League Soccer, placing them sixth in the Eastern Conference. Last season, Miami set an MLS record with a remarkable 22-4-8 record, but this year has represented a stark contrast.

"We're coming off a period of poor results," Messi acknowledged. "We need to keep working and finish May strongly, especially with the Club World Cup approaching on 14 June."

Inter Miami forward Lionel Messi vie for the ball with Orlando City midfield Joran Gerbet during the first half of an MLS soccer match. **PHOTO: PTI**

Amid these challenges, there are whispers about Messi's future with the club. Coach Javier Mascherano hinted that the team and Messi may extend their partnership beyond this season. *—PTI*

Minister confirms Messi's planned visit to Kerala

KOTTAYAM, 19 MAY

Kerala's Sports Minister V Abdurahiman has firmly dismissed social media speculation regarding Lionel Messi's scheduled visit to the state. He confirmed that the Argentine football superstar and his team are set to play a friendly match in Kerala, either in October or November this year.

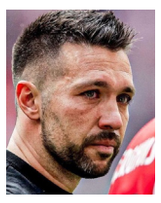
Abdurahiman labelled ongoing discussions as "unnecessary" and expressed pride in hosting such a legendary figure. He reiterated that there was "no room for doubt" about Messi's visit.

The minister previously refuted media claims of the Argentina national team reconsidering their trip, assuring that the sponsorship agreement with the Argentina Football Association (AFA) has been honoured. Anto Augustine, Managing Director of Reporter Broadcasting Company, mentioned that a date for the match would be announced shortly. *—PTI*

Ajax coach quits after cracked ties with top brass

AMSTERDAM, 19 MAY

Ajax coach Francesco Farioli has resigned following a disappointing end to the season that saw arch-rivals PSV Eindhoven crowned Dutch champions. Despite holding a commanding nine-point lead with just five matches to play, Ajax faltered, relinquishing their advantage and allowing PSV to clinch the Eredivisie title on Sunday.



In a heartfelt statement, Farioli expressed his reasons for stepping down, stating, "The management and I have the same goals for the future of Ajax, but we have different visions and timeframes about how we should work and operate to achieve those goals." The 36-year-old coach, who made history as Ajax's first Italian manager and the first non-Dutch coach since 1998, was visibly emotional after Sunday's match. *—PTI*

SINNER BACK AFTER BAN

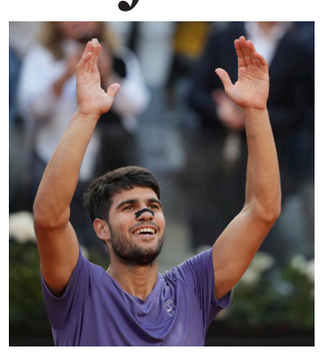
Alcaraz clear favourite for French Open

ROME, 19 MAY

Carlos Alcaraz is the clear favorite for the French Open. Top-ranked Jannik Sinner is back from his doping ban, though, and building himself back up to full strength day by day.

Those were the verdicts after Alcaraz beat Sinner to win the Italian Open a week before Roland Garros starts on Sunday.

Alcaraz's title in Rome boosted his record on clay this season to 15-1.



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain **PHOTO: PTI**

"On clay right now, you're the best player," Sinner told Alcaraz during the trophy ceremony after the Spaniard's 7-6 (5), 6-1 win Sunday.

Sinner held two set points during the first set against Alcaraz in his first tournament following his three-month suspension.

"The level he has played in this tournament is insane after three months without playing," Alcaraz said. "He's going to be better and better. … He's going to be a really dangerous player in Paris."

If Alcaraz and Sinner meet again in Paris, it will be in the final, because Alcaraz moved up to No. 2 in the rankings on Monday — meaning they will be on opposite sides of the draw at Roland Garros.

Alcaraz beat Sinner over five sets in the French Open semifinals en route to the title last year. Alcaraz then also defended his Wimbledon title for his fourth Grand Slam trophy. *—PTI*